

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IO-10

AID-05 OMB-01 /071 W

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R 210657Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5329

INFO AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

AMCONSUL SYDNEY

AMCONSUL MELBOURNE

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 1778

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: AS, PINT

SUBJ: MALCOLM FRASER ELECTED LIBERAL PARTY LEADER

REF: CANBERRA 1662

1. SUMMARY: AT SPECIAL MEETING OF LIBERAL PARTY PARLIAM-
MENTARY CAUCUS MARCH 21, MR. J. MALCOLM FRASER DEFEATED
B.M. SNEDDEN AS LIBERAL LEADER (AND, BY IMPLICATION, AS
OPPOSITION LEADER) BY VOTE OF 37-27. END SUMMARY.

2. AT SPECIALLY -CALLED MEETING IN CANBERRA OF LIBERAL
PARTY PARLIAMMENTARY CAUCUS MORNING OF MARCH 21 MR. J. MALCOLM
FRASER, FORMER MINISTER FOR DEFENSE AND EDUCATION, WAS
ELECTED PARLIAMMENTARY LEADER OF LIBERAL PARTY, REPLACING
MR. B.M. SNEDDEN. WHILE FULL DETAILS NOT YET AVAILABLE,
FRASER WAS ELECTED BY VOTE OF 37 TO 27 VOTES FOR SNEDDEN.
AS ANTICIPATED, POSITION OF LIBERAL PARTY LEADER WAS DE-
CLARED VACANT BY PARTY VOTE (BREAKDOWN OF VOTE ON THAT
MOTION NOT AVAILABLE), FOLLOWING WHICH FRASER ELECTED.
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MHR PHILLIP R. LYNCH REMAINS AS DEPUTY LEADER OF LIBERAL

PARTY,

3. COMMENTING AFTER VOTE, FRASER SAID THAT LIBERAL PARTY HAD GIVEN HIM A GREAT RESPONSIBILITY. HE WILL COMMENT FURTHER AT PRESS CONFERENCE LATER IN DAY. FOR HIS PART, SNEDDEN ANNOUNCED HE WOULD REMAIN IN FEDERAL PARLIAMENT AND PLEDGED SUPPORT FOR FRASER AS NEW PARTY LEADER.

4. COUNTRY PARTY LEADER J.D. ANTHONY ANNOUNCED HIS ACCEPTANCE OF CHANGE IN LIBERAL PARTY LEADERSHIP (WHICH IMPLIES LEADERSHIP OF OPPOSITION AS A WHOLE), THOUGH EMPHASIZING THAT THIS WAS MATTER FOR LIBERAL PARTY TO DECIDE.

5. ISSUE OF OPPOSITION SHADOW MINISTRY HAS NOT YET COME UP. HOWEVER, DR.A.J. FORBES, OPPOSITION SPOKESMAN FOR DEFENSE, ANNOUNCED HIS RESIGNATION FROM SHADOW MINISTRY AFTER VOTE AND SAID HE WOULD NOT BE CANDIDATE FOR NEXT PARLIAMENT. FORBES HAD BEEN PARTICULARLY CRITICAL OF CONTINUING EFFORT BY FRASER SUPPORTERS SINCE LAST NOVEMBER TO REPLACE SNEDDEN.

6. IN CONVERSATION WITH LABOR OFFICER IN MELBOURNE MAR 17 R.J. HAWKE, PRESIDENT OF ALP AND OF ACTU, SAID HE TOOK IT AS FACT THAT SNEDDEN WAS FINISHED AND THAT FRASER WOULD WIN LIBERAL LEADERSHIP. WHILE STATING HE DISLIKES EVERYTHING FRASER STANDS FOR, HAWKE ADMITTED TO RELUCTANT ADMIRATION OF WAY FRASER HANDLED HIS SHADOW PORTFOLIO OF LABOR AFFAIRS. HAWKE SAID FRASER HAD ACQUIRED THOROUGH KNOWLEDGE OF INDUSTRIAL LABOR PROBLEMS.

7. PAST SEVERAL DAYS HAVE BEEN PERIOD OF CONSIDERABLE ACTIVITY WITHIN LIBERAL PARTY, WITH FRASER AND SNEDDEN INDICATING TO MEDIA THEY HAD NECESSARY VOTES TO WIN CONTEST. WORKING AGAINST FRASER HAS BEEN HIS REPUTATION FOR ALOOFNESS BORDERING ON ARROGANCE AND FEELING NOW IS NOT TIME TO CHANGE PARTY LEADERS. WORKING AGAINST SNEDDEN HAS BEEN WIDESPREAD FEELING HE SIMPLY WAS NOT ABLE TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE LEADERSHIP TO OPPOSITION AND WAS PARTICULARLY WEAK IN FACING UP TO PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM IN PARLIAMENT. MORGAN GALLUP POLL PUBLISHED IN BELLETIN MARCH 19 MAY HAVE DEALT SNEDDEN FINISHING BLOW, WHEN IT SHOWED THAT SNEDDEN'S POPULARITY

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WITH VOTERS HAD DROPPED TO 25 PCT, DOWN FROM 28 PCT. IN LAST THREE WEEKS. BULLETIN PUBLISHED POL UNDER HEADLINE, QTE LATE POLL: SNEDDEN MUST GO END QTE. OBVIOUSLY, MAJORITY OF LIBERAL PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUS AGREED WITH THIS VIEW.

8. COMMENT: FRASER IS VERY CONFIDENT FIGURE, FROM WEALTHY LANDOWNING BACKGROUND. AT AGE 44 HE ALREADY HAS NEARLY 20 YEARS EXPERIENCE IN FEDERAL PARLIAMENT, INCLUDING SIX YEARS

AS MINISTER IN INCREASINGLY SENIOR POSITIONS. FRASER'S GRAND-FATHER WAS A SENATOR IN FIRST AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL PARLIAMENT IN 1900. FRASER WILL FIND IT NECESSARY TO DILUTE SOMEWHAT HIS PRESENT REPUTATION AS A CONSERVATIVE. HOWEVER, HE IS STRONGLY COMMITTED PERSONALLY TO ANZUS AND TO CLOSE RELATIONS BETWEEN AUSTRALIA AND UNITED STATES. AMPLE BIO INFO ON HIM AVAILABLE IN WASHINGTON.

9. AT PRESS CONFERENCE AFTERNOON OF MAR 21 FRASER SAID HE THOUGHT HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES SHOULD NORMALLY SERVE FOR USUAL THREE YEAR TERM, AND HE SAID HE WOULD LIKE TO SEE END TO ELECTIONS ATMOSPHERE WHICH HAS DOMINATED AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL SCENE FOR PAST NINE MONTHS OR SO. HOWEVER, FRASER RESERVED RIGHT TO PRESS FOR ELECTIONS IF LABOR GOVERNMENT IS SEEN TO BE PERFORMING POORLY. IN SUCH CASE HE SAID HE WOULD SEEK TO CATCH LABOR GOVERNMENT WHEN IT IS MOST VULNERABLE. EFFECT OF HIS COMMENTS SEEMS TO PUT PROSPECT OF NATIONAL ELECTIONS INTO BACKGROUND FOR TIME BEING.

10. IMPACT OF CHANGE IN LIBERAL LEADERSHIP ON POLITICAL SITUATION WILL BE ADDRESSED MORE FULLY IN NEXT WEEK OR SO.
HARROP

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